

COLONIAL SECRETARY'S DEPARTMENT.

No. 244.—The following Finding of the Marine Court of Enquiry held on the 11th May, 1921, to enquire into the circumstances in connection with the stranding of the British Steamship *Hong Moh*, is published for general information.

CLAUD SEVERN,
Colonial Secretary.

27th May, 1921.

FINDING.

We find that the British S.S. *Hong Moh*, Official Number 85,862 of Singapore, of which HENRY WILLIAM HOLMES Number of whose Certificate of Competency is 2,279 Hongkong, was Master, left Hongkong on the 2nd March, 1921, for Swatow and Amoy with crew numbering 48 and through passengers from Singapore numbering 1,135, maximum draft was 22 feet 6 inches. She arrived off Swatow about 9.30 a.m. on March 3rd but the draft of the ship was too great to cross the bar so the ship proceeded towards Amoy but owing to persistent representations by the Swatow passengers the Master decided to return and anchored in the vicinity of Bill Island off Swatow and signalled for a pilot to take the ship in to Swatow. A pilot came off and informed the Master that it was impossible to do so on account of the ship's draft. At 5.30 p.m. on March 3rd, the S.S. *Hong Moh* weighed anchor and stood down to the South and when in a position about 1 or 2 miles North-East or East-North-East of the Good Hope Cape the course was set S. 85 E. by compass, the compass having 1° Easterly deviation, speed 9 knots increased to 10 knots at about 6.30 p.m. The weather was strong North-Easterly wind, rough sea overcast cloudy and visibility not good. It is not clear from the evidence whether the Master intended to pass:—

- (1.) South of the Boat Rocks.
- (2.) Between the White Rocks and High Lammock Island.
- (3.) To the North of the High Lammock Island.

If he intended to pass South of the Boat Rock, the wrong course was set. If he intended to pass between the White Rocks and High Lammock Island, we are of opinion that the passage would have been dangerous and undesirable, in view of the weather conditions and low visibility. If he intended to pass North of the Lammoeks Light, the course should have been altered at a safe distance from the Lammoeks Light, the course was not altered and the vessel struck the North-West point of the White Rocks at 7.20 p.m. on March 3rd. After the vessel struck, the weather became worse and at 3 a.m. March 4th the vessel broke in two. We are of opinion that after the stranding the Master and Officers did all that was possible to assist the passengers. The sea was too rough to launch boats. At 9 a.m. on the 4th March, the S.S. *Shansi* of 1984 tons was sighted and closed the *Hong Moh* and stood by till p.m. on the 5th. The sea was too rough for boat work, though this was attempted by the *Shansi*. We are of opinion that the *Shansi* did all that was possible under the circumstances, picking up all the Officers, some of the crew and a few of the passengers who had jumped overboard and drifted passed the *Shansi*. Many were drowned in attempting this. The Master was drowned while attempting to swim from the *Hong Moh* to the *Shansi*. The *Shansi* then proceeded to Swatow, with about 45 survivors on board, with a view to getting further assistance. We consider the S.S. *Shansi's* decision to proceed to Swatow where she hoped to obtain further assistance, was a wise and proper thing to do.

Distress Signals were sent up by the *Hong Moh* after stranding and a steamer was sighted distant 2 to 3 miles. This steamer signalled by Morse Lamp. No answer could be made by the *Hong Moh* as her dynamo was out of action and the oil signal lamp was of insufficient power. This unknown steamer did not stand by but proceeded on its course. Other steamers were sighted by day on the 4th and 5th and on the night of the 4th March at various distances from the *Hong Moh*, none passing close. None of these steamers closed the *Hong Moh* or offered assistance. Only in one instance have we any evidence that any of these steamers sighted the wreck and in that case we have been unable to call the Master.

The S.S. *Shansi* reported the wreck on arrival at Swatow at about 6.45 p.m. on March 5th. The British Consul was informed. The Agents of the *Hong Moh* were informed. The former advised S. N. O. Hongkong and requested assistance. The latter sent out a launch on the morning of the 6th.

H.M.S. *Foxglove* on passage from Shanghai to Hongkong, when 50 miles to the N.E. of the Lammocks intercepted a Wireless Telegraph Message from H.B.M. Consul, Swatow to Commodore in Charge, Hongkong, reporting the disaster and asking for immediate assistance. *Foxglove* shaped course for the Lammocks and arrived in the vicinity at 10.30 p.m. on 5th March, there was no sign of the wreck in the dark. At daylight on the 6th March, H.M.S. *Carlisle*, which had been ordered from the Pescadores by the Commodore, Hongkong, arrived and the two ships carried out rescue work under great difficulty and at 5 p.m. *Foxglove* left for Hongkong, owing to coal shortage and engine trouble, with 48 survivors on board. On the 7th March, H.M.S. *Carlisle* continued the rescue work throughout the day and when darkness set in the rescue work went on by aid of *Carlisle's* searchlights. At about 8 p.m. Captain E. R. G. R. EVANS, C.B., D.S.O., R.N., H.M.S. *Carlisle* swam to and boarded the wreck and thereby encouraged and assisted the remaining people on board to gain the boats lying off from the wreck. This went on till about 11 p.m. when the operation was abandoned for the night.

At dawn on the 8th March, the *Carlisle's* boats again closed the wreck and as no sign of life was seen to exist, the *Carlisle* left the vicinity for Hongkong with 220 survivors on board.

A small boat attached to the Lammocks Lighthouse was observed to render assistances by taking people from the adjoining rocks.

Finding.

We find that the cause of the casualty was the faulty nature of the course set and kept, which as explained above was either wrongly set or wrongly chosen or wrongly continued.

We desire to record the persistent effort at rescue made by the British S.S. *Shansi* during the 4th and 5th March.

The Court are of opinion that had vessels passing in the vicinity and in sight of the wreck previous to the *Shansi's* arrival, closed the wreck and ascertained whether it was practicable to render assistance, and if not, reported by Wireless Telegraph or proceeded to the nearest port and reported the casualty, many more lives would probably have been saved.

The Court take this opportunity of recording the prompt assistance sent by the Commodore, Hongkong, the speedy arrival of H.M.S. *Foxglove* and H.M.S. *Carlisle* on the scene of the disaster, the skilful handling of the ships, the bravery, endurance, and seamanship displayed by the boats' crews of the said ships and especially the heroic action of Captain E. R. G. R. EVANS.

Given under our hands at Victoria, in the Colony of Hongkong, this 11th day of May, 1921.

(Signed)	CONWAY HAKE, Lieutenant, R.N.R., <i>Stipendiary Magistrate and President of the Court.</i>
„	S. ROBINSON, Lieut.-Commander, R.N., Superintendent, Chart Depot, H.M. Dockyard.
„	W. DAVISON, Canadian Pacific Ocean Services, Ltd.
„	E. WALKER, Master, British S.S. <i>Haiyang</i> .
„	J. McAINSH, Master, British S.S. <i>Yuensang</i> .